

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A process for cleaning tray columns which have been used for rectificatively treating liquids comprising (meth)acrylic acid, esters of (meth)acrylic acid or mixtures of (meth)acrylic acid and esters of (meth)acrylic acid: the process comprising

conveying a basic liquid downward through the tray column, and

passing a gas through the tray column in countercurrent to the basic liquid,

wherein during the cleaning, a difference between a pressure in the gas immediately below a lowermost tray of the tray column and a pressure in the gas immediately above an uppermost tray of the tray column divided by the number of trays in the column is from 0.5 to 5 mbar per tray at least 0.5 mbar per tray.

Claim 2 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein, during the cleaning, the difference between the pressure in the gas phase immediately above the uppermost tray of the tray column and the pressure in the gas phase immediately below the lowermost tray of the tray column divided by the number of trays in the column is from 1 to 5 mbar per tray.

Claim 3 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein, during the cleaning, the difference between the pressure in the gas phase immediately above the uppermost tray of the tray column and the pressure in the gas phase immediately below the lowermost tray of the tray column divided by the number of trays in the column is from 2 to 4 mbar per tray.

Claim 4 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the basic liquid is an aqueous solution of sodium hydroxide.

Claim 5 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the gas passed through the tray column in countercurrent to the basic liquid is air.

Claim 6 (Canceled).

Claim 7 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the gas passed through the tray column in countercurrent to the basic liquid is selected from the group consisting of nitrogen, air, air diluted with nitrogen, steam and mixtures thereof.

Claim 8 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the basic liquid is an aqueous solution of at least one selected from the group consisting of alkali metal hydroxide, alkaline earth metal hydroxide, NaOH, KOH and Ca(OH)₂.

Claim 9 (Currently Amended): The process as claimed in Claim 7, wherein a material selected from the group consisting of a substantially pH-neutral alkali metal salt, an alkaline earth metal salt, ~~or a combination both~~ and a mixture thereof, is added to the basic ~~aqueous solution~~ liquid.

Claim 10 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the basic liquid is a basic polar organic solvent.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): The process as claimed in Claim 10 ~~Claim 9~~, wherein the basic polar organic solvent is an amine, amide or a mixture of amine and amide.

Claim 12 (Currently Amended): The process as claimed in Claim 7, wherein the basic ~~aqueous solution~~ liquid is utilized at a temperature of from $>80^{\circ}\text{C}$ to about 115°C .